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U.S. Assigns Saigon Role To a Woman

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 15—First the Americans concentrated on Vietnamization. Then they turned to civilianization. Now they are trying a little feminization.

This latest American effort in Vietnam is personified by Mrs. Ann Bottorff, a tall, slim, 52-year-old Government information specialist recently appointed the official spokesman for the newly established Defense Attaché's Office in Saigon.

The Defense Attaché is Maj. Gen. John E. Murray, who is, since the departure of the last American troops of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, on March 29, the highest-ranking United States military official in this country. He is attached to the American Embassy.

Mrs. Bottorff is his special assistant for public affairs, the holder of a job that under the old M.A.C.V. set-up was exclusively reserved for colonels and males.

Mrs. Bottorff is neither. When, at the urging of friends, she applied for her new job, she assumed that her lack of anything resembling the traditional attributes would disqualify her.

"I was quite frankly surprised that a woman was really acceptable," she said in an interview in her office at the sprawling former United States headquarters at Tan Son Nhut airport.

Reportedly, however, the Government has decided to "civilianize" the image of the Defense Attaché's office as much as possible, when a qualified woman applied. Government officials leaped at the chance to add a feminine touch.

Although Mrs. Bottorff has only been in Saigon a few weeks, she has already created the impression in official circles here that she is clearly qualified.

Old Tie to Asia

She has close links with Asia that stretch over many years. She worked in Asia as a Government employee, met her husband in Asia and was legally separated from him in Asia.

Mrs. Bottorff, born in Kansas City, was 3 years old when she was taken by her parents to China, where her father, Vernon Nash, a journalist and Rhodes scholar, organized the first school of journalism in Asia at Yenching University in Peking.

The family returned to the United States in 1936 and

Mrs. Bottorff completed her secondary education and got her bachelor's degree at Cornell. She then worked for Vogue magazine for a year, and returned to China briefly in 1945 as an employee of the Office of Strategic Services.

In 1946, after a short stay in the United States, "to let my parents take a look at me for a while," she went back to China as an employee of what was to become the Central Intelligence Agency.

"I was not doing anything glamorous, like being an operative," she said, brushing a wisp of her straight, neatly trimmed white hair away from her face. "I was an editorial analyst in Shanghai."

Role of a Housewife

That same year she married John A. Bottorff, who was also with the intelligence agency in China. Under regulations she was required to resign when they were married and she became "strictly a housewife."

In 1962, when the Bottorffs had three daughters, they broke up their marriage, and were divorced the following year. "Unfortunately," Mrs. Bottorff said, "he decided he'd like to be married to someone else."

In 1966 she became the first woman civilian to be sent to the Defense Information School. Her career ascended. Her last post was policy coordination officer for the Navy Office of Information.

She had never been in Saigon before she arrived on March 18. Her reaction to Tan Son Nhut Airport was, "This has to be one of the ugliest places in the world."